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First Shipment of Washington State Potatoes Arrives in Japan

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Report Highlights:

On February 11, 2011, the first shipment of U.S. chipping potatoes from Washington State arrived in Japan. While thirteen U.S. States are currently eligible to ship to Japan, only the State of California has been shipping since the market open back in 2006. Japanese importers were reportedly satisfied with the quality of the Washington State potatoes. Hence, more shipments from the state are expected in the coming months. In 2010, U.S. exports of chipping potatoes hit an all time record at \$1.3 million.

First Shipment of Washington State Chipping Potatoes Arrives in Japan

On February 11, 2011, a small shipment of U.S. chipping potatoes from Washington State arrived in Japan. In 2006, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and USDA reached an agreement that allows limited imports of fresh potatoes from the United States, strictly for chip manufacturing. Prior to 2006, Japan banned all imports of fresh potatoes from the United States due to phytosanitary concerns. Under the agreement, thirteen U.S. States are currently eligible to ship to Japan. Idaho was initially included as one of the eligible shipping states but later banned. Due to MAFF's costly and strict import procedures, only the State of California has been shipping since the market opened. Japanese importers have access to U.S. fresh potatoes only from the beginning of February to the end of June. In addition, only one port-area facility, located in Hiroshima, is allowed to process U.S. fresh potatoes in Japan.



MAFF inspectors examine the first shipment of Washington State potatoes.

Anticipating extremely low yields in the next Japanese potato crop and seeking to stabilize potato supplies in the future, Japanese chip manufacturers have been actively looking for additional U.S. potato suppliers within California and beyond. The U.S. potato industry has been working very closely with Japanese manufacturers in testing new potato varieties, and also storage potatoes, to expand their foreign purchases. Similarly, FAS, APHIS, and the U.S. potato industry have been working with MAFF inspectors to facilitate the sourcing of U.S. potatoes from other eligible states.

After a successful audit visit by MAFF inspectors, the State of Washington is now the second U.S. state exporting chipping potatoes to Japan. While this first shipment was small, importers report that the quality of the Washington State potatoes effectively met the needs of Japanese chipping manufactures so more shipments are expected in the coming months. Different from California potatoes, which are shipped fresh, Washington state potatoes are stored potatoes. The fact that chip manufacturers were able to use storage potatoes so successfully opens a great deal of opportunities for U.S. chipping potatoes in this market.



*First batch of potato chips made from Washington State potatoes.
Japanese manufacturers expressed great satisfaction with chips' taste and color.*

Overall, Japanese potato chip manufactures use between 310,000 -340,000 metric tons of potatoes annually. During the last marketing year, U.S. shipped a total of 1,899 metric tons of chipping potatoes to Japan, the highest level on record. Hence, the Japanese market still holds vast potential for U.S. chipping potatoes. FAS, APHIS and the U.S. potato industry continue their efforts with MAFF to extend the allowable shipping period, gain the approval of additional processing facilities, and reinstate Idaho as an eligible shipping state.